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RHODA AND ALICE McDOYLE.  
Humpbacked Rhoda—p. 4.

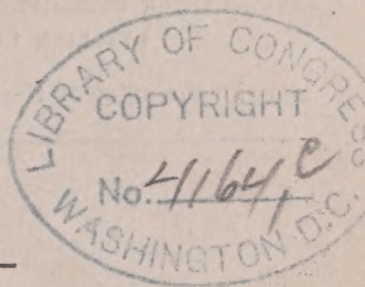


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# HUMPBACKED RHODA.

BY THE AUTHOR OF  
"THREE CHRISTMAS DAYS."

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# HUMPBACKED RHODA.

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## CHAPTER I.

“**Y**OU can’t play!” “We don’t want you!” “No, Rhoda Fenn can’t play ‘I spy.’” “Come on! Leave her there.”

Cruel words they were to the ears of the poor little deformed girl who stood wistfully by the school-house steps while her mates in eager groups hurried to the playground! A moment more, and they were all gone. Rhoda sat down and leaned her head in the doorway. There was a hard lump in her throat, and a bitter tear or two escaped from her heavy eyes. She could have cried heartily, but this was not the first time the thoughtless children with slights and unkind neglect had left her alone and desolate.

She thought she was getting used to it. But this bright morning, the air so full of life and every living thing so gay and free, she felt herself strong and well. Breathing the universal exhilaration, she forgot for the moment that her limbs were so slender and weak and her back so constantly painful.

"I almost know," she murmured, "that I could run as well as the rest of them if they'd only let me." And her eyes wandered longingly to the merry groups whose shouts of joyous laughter rang on the morning air.

Perhaps the sight of the little bent figure in the doorway caught the eye of Alice McDoyle in one of her swift runs to the goal, for soon a substitute was seen taking her place in the game, and her light form was bounding down the hillside, over the brook, and up the worn, narrow path to the school-house.

The next instant her arms were about Rhoda's neck and all her heart going out in pitying words and loving caresses.



“It’s too bad—too bad—too bad, Rhoda!” said she. “Oh how could we all go off and forget you so? Will you forgive me, Rhoda?”

Forgive her! Just as if she of all the thoughtless number had not always been the poor girl’s only comforter.

Sweet Alice McDoyle! The only child of the good minister in that old-fashioned country parish, her mother counted a very angel among the worthy people, it could not be otherwise than that, with training such as hers, her heart should be loving and kind and full of pity for all distress. So it happened that often poor, humpbacked Rhoda, suffering under some new stroke of heartless neglect or taunt of cruel playmate, had found in Alice a tender sympathizer and, as far as it was possible, protector. Indeed, upon this foundation there had arisen a structure of real friendship, one of those sweet child-loves so beautiful in their innocence of conventionality and affectation. It was the cause of



their daily lamentation that they lived in opposite directions from school, that because of Rhoda's diminutive stature they could not occupy the same desk, and that, on account of the difference in their attainments, they could not be in the same classes.

In age they were the same, but this was Rhoda's first season at school. She lived with her grandmother, old Mrs. Pettibone, away on East Mountain, in a poor, brown house, before which stood two tall poplars, like ancient sentinels, now half decayed and leafless.

Here little Rhoda was brought when a baby by Mrs. Pettibone's daughter, whose husband had died leaving her penniless and sick. She did not live long. The baby never remembered her mother. She only knew when she grew older that "dear, good old grandma" had been both father and mother to her.

With inexpressible tenderness the old lady loved this little orphan—the more when she

found that from the effects of an early and dreadful fall she would be disfigured, perhaps crippled, for life.

Rhoda was never well, and partly for this reason, partly because of the exposure to slights and perchance ridicule which her grandmother so much dreaded for her, she had been kept closely at home. But she had learned to read and spell, and never cared to go among other children, whose curious looks and overheard exclamations of pity caused her to shrink sensitively from their association. So she had never attended school till this eventful summer.

The teacher, in her walks to other homes, had often passed by the poor cottage, and caught glimpses of the bright, earnest face sometimes framed in the narrow window-sash, sometimes bent over a book outspread on the great rock at the foot of one of the old poplars, and oftener leaning against the side of the doorway, Rhoda's favourite attitude.



“Don’t you want to come to school, little girl?” she said to her one morning. And Rhoda, won immediately by the kind voice and smile, replied, “Yes, ma’am.” And then instantly a cloud came over her face, and she added, “I don’t know—no, ma’am.”

But the teacher, learning first from Mrs. Pettibone the whole sad history, overcame at last the fears of both, and took the little humpbacked orphan with her to school, where, during school-hours, she was happy and content. It was when recesses came and during the long “noonings” that she felt the difference between herself and others.

More than once she had carried a heavy heart home to her grandmother and said she could never go again. Indeed, she would have given it up many times had she not learned to love Miss Melvin so dearly, and dear Alice McDoyle.



## CHAPTER II.

THE two little girls sat a long time together on the stone steps, the brown hair of the orphan lying against Alice's golden curls and her two hands folded together in her lap, while Alice stroked soothingly her forehead.

"Poor Rhoda!" she whispered. "But I love you dearly. Oh, don't cry! And so does Miss Melvin."

"And so does Jesus too," added Rhoda, softly. And then Alice was silent. She knew nothing of the love of this good Friend and the comfort which He gives to sorrowing hearts, and she felt that if Rhoda knew she was far beyond her. She could say nothing more.

The bell struck, and the two rose to go in to their lessons. Oh what a contrast they

presented ! The one, fair, strong and beautiful, with rosy cheeks and a figure of grace ; the other, pale, weak in all her motions, her form distorted and misshapen. An equal contrast shone in their faces and a greater one existed in their hearts. Alice looked disturbed and unhappy. Those last words on the doorsteps had aroused anew the uneasiness of a heart not at peace with God. Conscience was whispering in her unwilling ear, "You don't love Jesus. You ought to love Him. Why don't you?"

Rhoda, having thrust from her heart the envious and angry feelings that at first rose up within her and prayed silently that she might be patient still, was thinking now how kind God was to give her yet so many loving friends, and how Jesus Christ, the best of all friends, was "the same yesterday, to-day and for ever." Grandmother had read the verse that very morning. A peaceful smile covered all her face and the light of sweet content shone in her eyes, so that Miss Melvin never



noticed that the lids were swollen with late weeping, or dreamed of the struggle that had been going on in her heart.

But when, at close of school, Rhoda lingered for another and another good-night kiss, looking with an unusual wistfulness into her face, Miss Melvin said :

“Is there anything you wish to say to me, Rhoda?”

“No, ma’am; only that I love you so much—so much.”

“And I love you too, my poor little Rhoda!”

“Oh, don’t say that, please, Miss Melvin, for indeed God is so good to me I don’t think I am poor at all.”

“And is it because you feel so rich that you always wear a smile and keep so patient, even when the children tease you?”

“Oh, but I am not patient. Indeed, Miss Melvin, you don’t know. Only to-day I felt so impatient and so wrong.”

“Well, I am sure those feelings did not



last long, for all day your face has expressed quite the contrary."

"Oh, they could not, Miss Melvin; when I remembered the Lord Jesus, I forgot for a minute—"

She coloured a little and looked down, imagining she saw in Miss Melvin's face disapproval either of the subject or of her boldness in speaking of it. But it was only self-reproach and pain at the contrast presented between her own heart and that of the meek little sufferer at her side. She felt conscious of rebellion at the thought even of Rhoda's misfortune. What if it had happened to herself! She knew she could never submit to it. She would wish she were dead. She would wish to kill the ugly children that called her names and ridiculed her deformity. She would even curse God for making her thus.

The consciousness of these wicked thoughts made her turn away from the peaceful face, across which the golden sun was throwing

gleams of radiance as it hastened to its setting.

A far-away look in Rhoda's eyes told that she was not gazing through the open door on the lengthening shadows upon the hillside, nor on the richness of the summer sunset. What she did see might have been guessed from her next words, spoken softly and reverently :

“Miss Melvin, grandma says I shall be straight like other children when I am with the angels.”

There was no answer save a quick impulsive kiss and a tear that dropped on Rhoda's own lashes as her teacher rose, tied the little gingham sun-bonnet under her chin, put on her own hat and led the way out of the school-house. Hand in hand they went down the shady road, growing dusky now, Rhoda too quietly happy for words and Miss Melvin too engrossed with painful self-communing.

So it was a silent walk, that mile and a half before the brown cottage was reached.



There, leaning over the gate, stood the old grandmother, anxiously looking down the road.

"How late you are, little daughter!" she said, caressingly.

"I kept her, Mrs. Pettibone," Miss Melvin explained, and, not trusting herself to say more, hastened on with a thoughtful and serious countenance. Little guessed Rhoda the tumult her words had awakened in the young teacher's breast. But when she knelt at her evening prayer that night she plead that God would bless her and sweet Alice McDoyle, and give them each a new heart.

• Then she lay down to her peaceful slumber, and the angels of God watched over her. Nay, God Himself kept the stricken one under the shadow of His wings, and she was safe.



### CHAPTER III.

WHILE Rhoda slept sweetly under the homely quilt in her grandmother's bedroom, and the old lady sat at her knitting in the adjacent kitchen, Alice McDoyle lay broad awake in her little white-curtained bed at the parsonage. She too had prayed before she lay down—at least had gone through the form of prayer. She had practiced this all her life, and would have thought the omission of it something fearfully wrong. But often there was little of true prayer in the act. It was a hollow repetition of words, and God seemed very far off. But to-night, as she repeated the customary "Our Father," Rhoda's words as they sat together on the school-house steps came to her mind, and she could not silence the still, small voice that whispered

again in her ear, "You don't love Jesus. You ought to love Him."

For a long time these thoughts kept her awake. She could hear the distant hum of voices, and knew that her father and mother were still talking by the open fire in the sitting-room. Presently the clock struck. She counted the strokes—seven—eight—nine.

"Now it is prayer-time," she said to herself. Then there was a low sound which she knew was her father's voice in prayer. She knew, too, that he would pray for her, that he would ask God to make her a good child, who should walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord. She had become so accustomed to hear this petition that she little heeded its meaning. Now it seemed to mean so much. She thought of Rhoda, and wondered if she had anybody to pray thus for her. "Did they have family prayer at Mrs. Pettibone's?" she queried.

At last she fell asleep, and dreamed that she and Rhoda were floating away together on a



beautiful silver cloud toward heaven. Over them hovered a shining angel, whose robes were golden light and whose brow was crowned with a coronet of glistening stars.

Presently she saw the angel bend nearer to them and gaze intently and, she fancied, sadly at her. Then a voice said, "Oh no! this is not one of the fair earth-flowers I was bidden to gather. It would never bloom in the celestial garden." Then the angel touched the cloud and it parted. Alice saw the silver folds wreath themselves around the spirit-form of her little friend and float far away out of sight, the beautiful angel still smiling near, while her own cloud pillow, no longer fringed with tints of rainbow beauty, but leaden and dull, melted away and she fell down—down—down to earth again.

"Wake up, Rhoda!" called the tender, quivering voice of grandma from the kitchen, where she was getting breakfast for two, thinking all the while how she could make it tempting for her darling.

"Wake up, Rhoda!" carolled a robin on the nearest branch of the old apple tree by her window.

"Wake up, Rhoda!" seemed to say a golden sunbeam that, having pushed its way between the fragrant blossoms and green leaves of the same old tree, essayed to creep under the lashes of the quiet slumberer.

"Wake up!" purred kitty, Rhoda's one only pet, whose velvet feet came treading softly up to her pillow.

So to the music of this odd quartette Rhoda opened her eyes on the new day; opened her heart to the sweet influences of the bright May morning; opened her lips in praises to Him who had permitted her to see and enjoy it.

Alice McDoyle woke to the sound of the breakfast bell, unwelcomely breaking in upon the heavy sleep in which her dreams had at last ended. Her gentle mother an hour before had looked in, and, fancying her little daughter looked tired or not well, had softly



shut the door and left her, "to take her nap out, dear child!"

Consciousness at length slowly returning, she remembered her thoughts the night before and her singular dream.

A sense of something undone, of duty unfulfilled, oppressed her. And so commenced the new day with Alice, the child of many prayers, dutiful, affectionate, always obedient and kind, lacking but the one thing needful. Would she seek that now?

Under another roof—that of a great farmhouse just half a mile beyond the small cottage of Mrs. Pettibone—Miss Melvin the teacher had a temporary home. At her window too the birds had sung merrily this joyous morning; the children had been frolicking gleefully a full half hour in the yard below. But she heard nothing until Joe, the farmer's eldest son, having already taken his own early breakfast and yoked his cattle while they were still munching theirs, in a meditative way cracked his long cart-whip

and shouted, "Now then! Haw, Buck! Get up, Bright!" as they started for the field.

It sounded to her like a call to work, to work!

While she dressed the sound of rattling pans reached her from the dairy and seemed to say, "Work! work!"

Robbie, the boy next younger than Joe, was chopping wood by the grindstone under the big pear tree, and the steady crack of his axe on the oaken logs repeated the word, "Work! work!"

"And nine o'clock will soon come, bringing *my* work," thought Miss Melvin. "Pleasant work, too, if all the children were like Rhoda Fenn and Alice McDoyle, but some of them are insufferably hateful!" And a sigh escaped her at the remembrance of her trials, daily renewed, with intellects dull, manners uncouth and tempers obstinate. Just then, the last touch having been added to her simple toilet, her eye fell on a verse of the open Bible which lay on the dressing-table just



as she had left it, on retiring, after vaguely turning over its leaves, thinking of her strange pupil, "that little patient, deformed creature," and saying to herself, "There must be something in religion. But I've said many a time I didn't believe it."

The passage her eye rested on was this :

"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."

"Work, work, still! And this is personal," she reflected. "Oh pshaw!" interrupting herself with a sudden exclamation; "can't I put these things out of my mind?" Conducive to which end, she hastened down stairs, where she found her breakfast kept warm and waiting by the good farmer's wife.

## CHAPTER IV.

A HALF hour's chat with busy, bustling Mrs. Brown, whose work seemed in no wise hindered whether she listened or talked, and then Miss Melvin set out for school, armed with a small basket containing her midday lunch, as a part of which, the good woman informed her, she had "tucked in a good slice of that 'ere cheese."

By her side trotted two sturdy young brothers of Joe and Bob, and clinging to hers by one chubby hand three-years-old Mary, the only daughter of the house of Brown.

Down the steep, winding mountain road they went, and were soon in sight of the tall poplars, under which, seated on the big rock waiting for them, appeared Rhoda.

"Hullo! Humpty Dumpty sat on the wall!" cried the little Browns, and were only checked



by the teacher's imperative "Hush!" just in time to prevent their words from reaching the ears of the unconscious child. She might have heard them even then had not her attention been so absorbed by her pet, the white kitten, around whose neck she had fastened a wreath of apple blossoms. "Good-bye, my Fleecy darling," she was saying; "I'm sorry you can't go to school with me. But you must be a very good kitty at home till I come back, will you? Now, mind!" she added, with finger uplifted and shaken warningly over pussy's head; "you are not to pull grandma's knitting to pieces, nor steal anything out of the pantry, nor catch any dear little birds in the apple tree, nor—"

Here she stopped, becoming suddenly aware of listeners.

"Oh, Miss Melvin," she cried when she saw who it was, "isn't Fleecy so sweet? And isn't it such a pity she can't learn to read?"

Then, with a parting embrace, she placed

her pet gently on the great rock, where, in truth, she remained but the smallest fraction of a minute, for her eyes had seen a terrible sight, the Brown boys, known far and wide in kittendom, the especial terror of timid creatures like Fleecy, in the very act of picking up stones. Who could doubt with what intent?

With a great palpitation of heart Kitty fled to the very top of the tallest poplar. Knowing her to be safe there, Rhoda went on, with the rest of the party, though she could not help feeling a little anxious till they were fairly out of sight. This was not soon, for on account of Rhoda's infirmity they were obliged to walk slowly—too slowly for the exuberant spirits of the boys, who, spoiling for some new mischief which they denominated fun, started off on a race. Perhaps, too, they did not care to stay where they could longer feel the rebuke of Rhoda's gentle presence. Calling them back for a moment, Miss Melvin gave them a somewhat



rusty key, bidding them open the school-house.

“Raise all windows,” she said, adding by way of explanation to the little girls, for Sam and Harry were already out of hearing, “to let in the fresh air, you know.”

Before they reached the school-house, they saw Alice coming, with her usual bound, down the hill from the opposite side, swinging her small tin pail, which glistened in the sunlight, as did her eyes with love-light when she heard them call her name.

In one hand she carried a bouquet of crocuses and daffodils, which she eagerly presented to Miss Melvin, who placed them lovingly in a tumbler on her desk, together with a handful of dandelions, the equally love-prompted offering of little Hannah Jones.

On the stove, empty now and rusty looking, stood a pitcher which was not all a pitcher. The nose was gone, also the handle, which deficiencies being concealed by a deft

arrangement of drooping flowers or overhanging sprays of leaves, quite an excellent vase had been improvised, which did duty all summer for huge bunches of apple and wild-cherry blossoms, these being preceded by shad-blows and boxwood, and followed by wild honeysuckle and mountain laurel. So all the long summer days the plain, unpainted school-room was brightened by gay floral tints from meadow and mountain, the eyes of both teacher and scholars made glad by the sight and the air redolent of sweetest fragrance.

"Oh, Mith Melvin, mayn't Tham Brown be thill thaking me?" cried a small boy, just out of petticoats. Which interrogatory Miss Melvin answered by jingling an unmusical bell in the doorway. The sound put an end to the incipient quarrel, broke up a merry game of "Tag," and brought all hands scrambling into the house. Not that they came literally on all fours, but in a tumbling, somersetting, tangling mass, in which to an



observer the individuality of any one boy or girl seemed irrevocably lost.

But in the "entry" the mass dispersed. Caps and bonnets were hung on their respective nails with surprising rapidity, and the owners scattered to their several seats, where Testaments were quickly produced and all was ready for the opening exercise.

To Miss Melvin, as to most of the scholars, this had always been like any other mere lesson in reading. So the pauses were all observed, each scholar kept his or her place and the words were all rightly pronounced, the end was answered.

Never before had she taken note of the great difference in faces during this exercise. This morning she noticed Phebe Gray's look of pride as she finished her two verses, conscious of being the best reader in school. She saw poor Susan Pond's blushes of confusion when some long, unaccustomed word caused her to hesitate and stammer painfully. She caught the roguish twinkle in Sam

Brown's eye as he read, taking pains to be very distinct, "This is John the Papist, he is risen from the dead."

She saw, smiling within, the frantic endeavours of Bennie, the small boy, to keep the place, and grew grave observing the total indifference of most to what they read. A compunctious thought smote her: was not this partly her fault?

Then her eyes rested on Alice and Rhoda, the former solemn and attentive, as at home she was taught to be when reading the word of God, but yet uninterested; the latter intently dwelling on each verse with the eagerness of one searching for hid treasure, her face now and then kindling into a joyful glow as some new light seemed to dawn on the words, giving them new meaning.

"Surely, the Book is more to her than to the rest of us," was the teacher's mental comment as she closed it and turned to the day's routine of labour, in which she managed for a while to forget the unwelcome subject.



## CHAPTER V.

RAPIDLY the hours of the forenoon passed. The last class was on the floor, at the head of which stood Sam Brown, who, with all his mischievousness, was an ambitious boy and had held his high position for a long time.

At an unlucky moment he missed a word in spelling, and Rhoda, advanced by dint of hard study to this class since the commencement of the term, spelled it correctly and went above him. Not a shade of triumph appeared in her manner, but rather regret, while Sam in his chagrin made angry and scornful faces at her. Poor Rhoda would have stepped back and resigned the place to him again, but a decided shake of her teacher's head prevented the generous act.

At precisely twelve o'clock the lesson-

weary and play-eager children burst from the school-room with a "Hip! Hurrah!" scattering to their dinners and games, not unfrequently combining the two sources of enjoyment, marbles in one hand and doughnuts in the other, or between bites depositing their bread and cheese on a rock to take their turn in "Toss and Catch."

A group of girls gathered around the teacher.

"Oh, Miss Melvin, will you go with us to the glen this noon?" said one.

"There's such beautiful moss there!" said another.

"And lots of violets," added a third.

"Yes, we'll go to the glen," said Miss Melvin.

Accordingly, off they started, but had hardly reached the foot of the hill when Rhoda, saying she had forgotten something, went back to the school-house. Presently she reappeared, hastening as fast as her weak limbs would permit to rejoin her companions.







RHODA AND MISS MELVIN.

Humpbacked Rhoda—p. 31.



“Go it, Humpty Dumpty!” called a sneering voice round the corner of the school-house, and a stone came whizzing toward her. It hit her ankle and nearly threw her down. When she reached the others her face was white with pain, but she only explained by saying her ankle was hurt a little, and never told a word of what she had heard, and which they were too far off to hear.

So on the little party went to where by the gurgling brookside grew the violets, blue ones and white ones, in lovely profusion. On a mossy rock Miss Melvin was made to sit down, while the little girls, making baskets of their aprons, gathered handful after handful of the delicate blossoms and quantities of shining green leaves, which they made into bouquets for their teacher. Only Rhoda gathered none.

Miss Melvin afterward knew that it was because her ankle pained her so much, but then she only thought it one of Rhoda's silent moods, and suffered her head to lie quietly in

her lap while she stroked back the dark hair from her white temples.

Presently, recurring to their former conversation, Miss Melvin said:

“Rhoda, I want you to tell me something. Was it always easy for you to bear the slights and taunts of your schoolmates?”

“Oh no, ma’am,” she answered. “At first it was very hard; I felt very angry when they would not let me play with them, and called them ugly names when they twitted me about—about—my humpback.”

“My poor, poor Rhoda!” whispered the pitying teacher; and, after a pause,

“At first, you say? When do you mean? Tell me when you first began to feel differently?”

“Oh, it was a long time ago. I had been one day with grandmother to Mrs. McDoyle’s, and you know that long mirror that hangs in her pretty parlour. I saw myself in it standing by the side of Alice, and oh, Miss Melvin, I did not know till then I was so—so



different. Grandmother's looking-glass is so small, you know. I knew then why grandmother always made me wear a little shawl when I went to school, even if it was summer, and why the boys called me— You know what they call me, Miss Melvin. How I cried and cried all the way home! And when I got to the great rock by the poplar tree I threw myself down on it and cried harder still. By and by I heard Sam Brown coming whistling along, and then I lay quite still, with my face to the rock, for I was afraid of him. Then he came close up to me, and I heard him say, 'Asleep, eh? I'll punch her up though, the little crook-back!' Yes, that's what he called me, Miss Melvin. And oh, I was so angry! I flew up and tried to strike him. But grandma's arm caught mine, and she lifted me up and carried me into the house. Then she sat down and rocked me, just as she used to when I was a baby, for a long time. When I got quiet at last and stopped sobbing she

commenced and told me the story of Jesus, how he was scourged, and mocked, and spit upon, while He was so innocent and holy too, and He answered not a word, and how He was crucified by the cruel soldiers, and even on the cross prayed His Father to forgive them.

“Then she told me about that dreadful fall when I was a baby. They thought it had killed me, but I lived, and grandma said it was because God had something for me to do—that He had spared me that I might grow up to be like Jesus Christ; and was it being like Him to do as I had done that day? Miss Melvin, I cried again then for shame and sorrow. I saw how wicked it was to murmur at what God had permitted for some wise purpose, and how dreadful it was to fall into such an angry passion. I begged grandmother to pray that my sin might be forgiven, and that I might be willing to be just as He has made me. Ever since that night I have tried to remember



Jesus, and when I am tempted to get angry at any one to be, like Him, forgiving. And then I shall not always have such a poor maimed body. See here!"—and she drew from her pocket her little Testament—"see what I found this morning: 'But we know that when He shall appear, *we shall be like Him*, for we shall see Him as He is!' Oh, Miss Melvin, what will it be to be like God, our heavenly Father?"

## CHAPTER VI.

**H**ERE the flower-gatherers came up, eager to display their treasures, but, struck by the pale yet beaming face of Rhoda, lying still in Miss Melvin's lap, they hushed their noisy exclamations, and when Alice said, "Oh, let's make a wreath for Rhoda," they all knelt softly round, and with tasteful fingers laid the fresh, beautiful blossoms like a crown around her head, here a bright blue forget-me-not, there a tiny white violet with purple veins, then a pink-tinted anemone, and between them all green leaves peeping out. Oh, 'twas too fair a picture to be so soon despoiled. But the hour's "nooning" was over, and reluctantly the happy party took their way back to the school-house.

"And we didn't have time to read any, after all," said Rhoda; "I thought it would



be so nice to read that chapter about the lilies down there by the brook, amongst the flowers. That's why I went back after my Testament."

On her attempting to walk, it was found that Rhoda's ankle was badly swelled. Inquiry into the matter convinced Miss Melvin that the stone which had hit it was thrown, and not, as she before supposed, accidentally rolled against it. Farther inquiry fastened the offence upon Sam Brown, who had taken this mean revenge for his morning's defeat, and he was sentenced to be flogged, which punishment, in spite of Rhoda's remonstrance, was summarily inflicted before the school as soon as the big farm wagon in which a ride home had been secured for her disappeared behind the trees.

"It is the only amends I can make, poor thing!" was the teacher's reflection as she sat, after her pupils were all gone, leaning both elbows on her desk and resting her head in her hands. "He deserved a sounder

whipping than that, and I don't believe there's a scholar in school but would have rejoiced in it had they been in Rhoda's place. But she—to think of her begging me not to do it! She's a strange child."

Thus she attempted to account for such unusual behaviour, but again the conviction forced itself upon her that there was something in religion, that she had been not only foolish but wicked to disbelieve it, and even more so to reject the opportunity of securing it for herself.

She had come to the Bearhill school from the midst of revival scenes in her own home in an adjoining town, where for years her father had maintained a course of opposition to everything religious. All her life she had heard the subject ridiculed, pronounced "humbug," "unmitigated cant," and its professors styled "consummate hypocrites." The revival Mr. Melvin had declared to be a silly farce, and effectually laughed his daughter out of any desire to participate in it. Fond



of her father in the extreme, she suffered his scoffing words to outweigh the truth spoken in the house of God, the entreaties of Christian friends anxious for her salvation, and even the pleadings of the still small voice in her inner soul.

One by one her young associates were brought into the fold of Christ, "making fools of themselves," Mr. Melvin deridingly said, while she remained without in apparent contentment with her condition. That she was not contented, in spite of her happy appearance and oft-repeated assertions, the walls of the little school-room had often borne witness when, as to-night, she sat by herself, thinking. Sometimes a letter from some of the rejoicing converts at home full of pleading—"Come with us, come with us, Anna!"—had called forth a flood of envious tears. Sometimes a verse of the Bible would arrest her attention in the morning reading, and at night she would remain till the last daylight was gone reading and re-reading the

chapter containing it, and turning over the leaves of the sacred Book in the vague expectation of finding something that would settle her doubts, for there was ever in her mind this unanswered query: "What if religion should be true, after all? And if indispensable—"

Oftener the cause of her anxious meditation was some trifling act of Rhoda's, small in itself, but greatly significant, revealing springs of motive of which she was unconscious. In her simple, consistent piety of life the poor deformed girl was constantly speaking to the heart of her teacher in a more forcible manner than she could have done by words.

"That child is a Christian if there is not another in the whole world," Miss Melvin often told herself. And not many days passed when her own sinfulness, selfishness and ingratitude did not receive some rebuke from the Christ-like conduct of the little humpback.



## CHAPTER VII.

THE shadows lengthened while Miss Melvin still sat by her desk in deep thought. The scholars, even those who lived the most remote, had reached their several homes. A full half hour Alice McDoyle had been sitting at her mother's side, unusually quiet, silent and serious. Mrs. McDoyle, accustomed to watch her daughter's manner, knew that something was on her mind, and that it would soon be revealed. Between them there was that beautiful confidence and unreserve that one loves to see between mother and daughter. Alice, from a little child, had been in the habit of telling her mother all her thoughts. Now, her heart was full of the wrongs of her chosen friend, and commencing at the beginning, she related the whole day's history. Her cheeks glowed with

indignation when she came to the part which Sam Brown had acted, and Mrs. McDoyle quite agreed with her that it was shameful and wicked.

“But, mother,” said Alice, “I’m afraid it did not do Sam any good to be flogged, for after school I heard him swearing that he would pay Miss Melvin for it, and that he would kill Fleecy—that’s Rhoda’s kitten, you know—this very night. Oh dear!”

After relating other grievances to which Rhoda was subject, and from that diverging to stories of various wickednesses to which her schoolmates were many of them addicted, even some of the girls—such as cheating about their lessons and telling falsehoods—she said, with a self-satisfied expression:

“I never do so, mother. You know I would not do such things.”

To which her mother had replied simply: “I hope not.”

Then she was silent and serious again for a long time. Mrs. McDoyle knew there



was yet something more disturbing Alice's thoughts. At last it came:

"Mother, I want to know one thing: I don't understand why it is that anybody so good and so sweet as Rhoda Fenn should have to suffer so much. Only think, mother, how poor they are!"

Then in a pitying tone she described the meagre and homely dinners she had often seen Rhoda bring to school, and did not forget to add how she had sometimes forced a part of her own bountiful and delicious ones upon her.

"I don't think Rhoda has any presents at all," she continued, "nor books to read, as I have. And she is sick so very, very often, and then she has that ugly hump on her back. Oh, the boys do talk dreadfully sometimes, and call her names, but she never gets angry, and is just as patient as can be. And, mother, she even told me the other day that she was almost glad she was ugly and deformed, for she said that Jesus was not fine-

looking, as other men, and that there's a verse in the Bible about his being disfigured. You know what it is, mother. 'His—' "

" 'His visage was so marred more than any man,' " said Mrs. McDoyle.

" Yes, that is it, but there is more. "

" 'And His form more than the sons of men.' "

" Yes, mother, and another verse says: " 'He hath no form nor comeliness.' But do you think it means what Rhoda said?—that Jesus Christ was not beautiful in person? Why, you know in my book of engravings all the pictures of Him are the finest-looking of all. And don't you remember that large engraving of Christ and St. John at Aunt Emily's? The face of Christ is perfectly lovely. It is more beautiful than an angel's. "

" Yes, Alice, " replied Mrs. McDoyle, " I know our Saviour is commonly represented as fair and beautiful, and this accords so well with our conceptions of His character that we can scarcely think it was otherwise, but



there are the inspired words. And it may be that the sufferings to which Jesus was exposed caused His face to become worn and haggard and His form prematurely bent. You know we read of His hard and constant labour, long fasts that he endured, and cruel treatment, and what constant anxiety of mind He was under. It is more than probable that His person showed the effects of all this, but then the beauty of soul which He possessed as no other man ever did must have overspread the marred visage, and to His true disciples I think He was ever 'fairer than the children of men,' the 'chiefest among ten thousand,' the one 'altogether lovely.' We sometimes see something like this in human faces. Can't you think of any one you know, Alice, who is very plain—more than that, very homely, as she is called—yet whose face it is good to look upon?"

"No, mother, I can't think of any one."

"Well, don't you think old Scotch Jeanie is a very ugly-looking person?"

"Why no, mother."

"But think of her high cheek bones, and her misshapen mouth, with those two solitary teeth, and her skin so wrinkled and dark."

"Oh, but her eyes, mother! They are so soft and loving! And when she smiles and calls me her 'sweet bairn' the wrinkles all seem to go away. I don't think I ever see them, mother, and then don't you know how she looks in church? I've often watched her face when it was certainly beautiful."

"It is the beauty of goodness you see, my daughter. I suppose your little friend Rhoda seems beautiful to you, does she not?"

"Oh yes, indeed, mother. I don't see how the boys can make fun of her. They wouldn't if they knew her as well as I do, I am sure."

"Do you know what is the secret of her loveliness, Alice?"

Alice did not answer. She knew well that between herself and Rhoda there was a great difference. She had been thinking much



about it, especially since one day some weeks before the opening of this story, when Rhoda had said to her, with that look of unutterable peace she so often wore: "Oh, Alice, isn't it sweet to trust in Jesus?" and Alice had found no response in her own heart.

Mrs. McDoyle waited a few moments, willing that Alice should dwell a little upon her own thoughts. Then she said:

"You asked me, my daughter, why Rhoda should be made the subject of so much suffering, and I have been thinking of the refiner's fire alluded to in the third chapter of Malachi. If you do not remember the passage, you may get your Bible and find it."

Alice read: "'He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver.'"

"Do you know," Mrs. McDoyle then continued, "it is said that workmen in silver, when purifying it in the fire, watch it closely and do not take it out till they can see their own faces reflected in it? So Christ is called a refiner of the heart, keeping it in the fur-

nance of affliction till He can see His own image shining there. Now, if Rhoda, tried in all these different ways, is becoming purified from sin, her character growing holy and Christ-like, is not this what He desires and loves to see? But hearts are not always tried in the same way. It is very hard to bear sickness, poverty and misfortune, to be always patient and unrepining under troubles. But sometimes God tries us by blessings. I think He is trying you thus now, Alice. Think in what different circumstances He has placed you from those which surround Rhoda. He is watching to see how you will bear the test, whether you will give Him gratitude and love and the service of your life, or whether you will love yourself and sin—whether you will bear His image and be pure as He is pure, or remain covered with the dross of unrighteousness. Which shall it be, Alice?"

She buried her face in her mother's lap, thinking with shame and confusion of all her



ingratitude and want of love to God, as well as of the hollowness of all the self-righteous acts in which she had thought herself better than others. Then there came to her mind the Gospel words, often read, but never felt before: "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required."

Begging her mother to pray for her, she retired to her own room filled with contrition and humility. There, on her knees, where she had often knelt before, but now for the first time really prayed, she confessed her sin and found peace in forgiveness.

## CHAPTER VIII.

THE next day Rhoda was not at school, and the day following, it being Saturday, Alice obtained permission to go and see what was the matter, though already pretty sure that the absence was caused by the injury to her ankle. Greatly to Alice's delight, Mrs. McDoyle said :

"I think I'll go with you, and we'll carry something nice to Mrs. Pettibone and Rhoda."

A basket of good things was accordingly set in the carriage, and they were soon on their way up the mountain, Alice bearing flowers in her hands and a great joy in her heart wherewithal to cheer the heart of her darling friend.

What passed between the two little girls in the small bed-room where Rhoda lay unable



even to sit up the two elder people talking together by the open door of the sitting-room never knew, but there was "joy in heaven among the angels of God," who saw and bent earthward to listen.

Riding silently home through the beautiful sunset light and falling shadows, Alice thought this had been the happiest day of her life.

It was not very long before Rhoda was well again as usual, and the two friends walked lovingly together in their quiet, happy school-life, bound now by a new tie to each other, and growing daily in Christian loveliness.

Uniformly correct and good as had always been Alice's outward conduct, a marked change now appeared in it, a conscientiousness that seemed to have other than her former selfish motives, a love of doing right for right's sake instead of love of praise, and a humility in all her actions quite in contrast with her former manner, which it must be

confessed had been sometimes more like the Pharisee than the publican.

Miss Melvin marked this change in Alice, and was not slow to understand the cause.

"She is sweeter and lovelier than ever," was her frequent soliloquy, "and if she, so near a saint before, needed religion, how much more I, who have been such a sinner!"

As the weeks went by she watched the conduct of her two pupils, yielding daily to the conviction of their sincerity and genuine piety, envying their happiness and growing herself more and more miserable in her conscious want of the same well-spring of joy. Her face was almost always clouded—cross, some of the scholars said—and her manner irritable. She felt "no peace."

And the summer days passed on with but slightly-varying routine, many of them calm and quiet, when the tide of school-life flowed peacefully, and it seemed might thus go on for ever.



Others came when the waves were broken and the very air seemed tempest-laden—days such as every teacher knows so well, when each hour strews a new wreck on the unquiet shore.

Such a day was clearly portended one hot morning in July. Miss Melvin read its signs in the fretful faces of group after group of panting children assembled at the usual hour around the school-house, heated already by their walk or by vain attempts to engage in play.

She heard a portentous sound, like the roll of far-off thunder, in the muttered exclamation of Sam Brown as he flung himself on the ground on the shady side of the house:

“I say, ain’t the teacher cross this morning!”

An actual faintness or sickness of heart came over her as she unlocked the door and entered the school-room. Perhaps it was in part the dead and stifling air within, heavy with the odor of wilted flowers in the pitcher

on the stove, or the sight of the previous day's débris scattered on the floor—crumpled pieces of scribbled paper, corners of geography leaves and spelling-books, intermingled with dandelion curls and twigs of birch. She had been too utterly weary the night before to attempt the customary sweeping, and certainly the place looked very uninviting. Not less so was the appearance of her desk, which she found, with dismay, unaccountably deluged with ink, a small black stream even then creeping its dingy way between the leaves of her register.

To repair damages and settle the dust of cleaning up required so much time that it was long past nine o'clock before she was ready to commence school, and then, as it was so late, she told the scholars they might omit reading in the Testament and begin at once their studies.

She affected not to see the look of surprise with which Alice and Rhoda received this announcement, but she could not fail to hear



Sam Brown's protest, delivered under his breath in the words—"I say! It's too blazin' hot to study!"

A double lesson was immediately assigned to him as a punishment, whereupon he grew sullen, and seemed to be meditating the chances of escape through the open door, or possibly the window near his desk, through which the glaring sun was now pouring with constantly increasing heat.

"May I have some water?" piped a little urchin on the lowest bench. Instantly every member of the school was choked with thirst.

"Whose turn is it to go after water to-day?" inquired Miss Melvin.

Sam Brown wished it was his.

"Mine! mine!" answered two or three voices, but the owners were found to be boys with very short memories. The right one was absent, so Harry Brown was substituted, and after what appeared to the impatient scholars, and not less to the really thirsty teacher, an unreasonably long space of time,

a bucket of fresh water from the spring stood in the entry. Harry was then commissioned to pass the water around, which he proceeded to do with not too steady a hand, spilling many a dipperful on the floor, besprinkling the rows of little bare feet, and even in his first essay, as he presented the brimming cup to his teacher, overturning the contents in her lap.

This, in justice to Harry, it must be said, was accidental. Not so the manner in which Hannah Jones received a deluge of cold water down the neck of her dress, nor the sudden jerk by which Bennie Brooks in the act of drinking was forced to attempt swallowing the whole cupful at a draught, failing in which, he became fearfully strangled, and might never have recovered but for a vigorous shaking by the half-frightened teacher.

This excitement being at last well over and all quiet once more, Miss Melvin applied herself to a class in arithmetic, striving to overcome her own languor and their dulness.



She was just rejoicing in having secured the attention and interest of every one when the sound of stifled sobbing reached her ear, and she discovered Bennie frantically stuffing his apron into his mouth and pouring a perfect cataract of the largest possible tears down over his chubby, dirty hands. In endeavouring to find out what was the matter, Miss Melvin drew the folds of the apron out of his mouth, and with it came the long pent-up and no longer repressible scream, while his small frame shook all over in the excess of his distress.

After waiting a little for this to subside, she again put the question, "What's the matter, Bennie?"

With a spasmodic catch of his breath, Bennie half screamed, "There was a—boo-hoo! —a little—boo—a little polywog—in—in the—in the dipper—an' I—I—I swallowed it! Boo-hoo!"

The combined energies of Miss Melvin and Bennie's older sister were scarcely equal to

the task of quieting and keeping quiet the poor boy's fears and sobs during the remainder of the morning session. Indeed, such had been his fright that their vehemence would hardly have been lessened the sooner had he heard Harry Brown's confession to the boys at recess :

"'Twas only a piece of my old shoestring, but you'd ought to ha' seen his eyes when I told him he'd drunk a polywog!"



## CHAPTER IX.

HIGH noon that day found Bearhill school-house a perfect oven. What a glad escape it was from its heated walls and close atmosphere to the shady glen and the cool brookside! Lying there on the green banks listening to the brook's low ripple, or wading through its bed, whose cool, smooth stones beneath the feet were so refreshing, the oppressive sun was forgotten and the hour passed delightfully by.

Far too short it seemed to both teacher and scholars, for whom it was equally hard to go back to slates and books and the unshaded confinement of the school-room. But one o'clock found them all in their places. Miss Melvin, somewhat refreshed by the noon's rest, made an earnest effort to disprove the predictions of the morning, but it was fruit-

less. Her patience gave way before the listlessness and inattention which had never seemed so trying as on this trying day. Never had the reading-classes committed such wholesale murder of the English language; never had commas, periods and inflections of all kinds been so entirely ignored; never had words been so egregiously mispronounced. Even Phebe Gray, reading about "the hymeneal nest" in Tom Hood's "Lines to his Infant Son," called it "the hyeneal nest"—a mistake, however, which none but the teacher appreciated, and she too wearily to smile. And Sam Brown, whether from ignorance, carelessness or mischief it was difficult to determine, read the concluding line, "Play on! play on! my elephant John!"

A breathlessness seemed filling all the air, a suffocating deadness, an oppressive languor, that was irresistible. The scholars seemed almost to gasp for breath sufficient to read at all. Still Miss Melvin persevered, and bade them turn to the next page and try one piece



more. It was entitled, "Elijah on Mount Horeb."

As the reader commenced the first verse a sudden shadow fell across his book, and a sound of distant thunder called the attention of all to the windows, whence they could see an angry cloud, unnoticed before. While they looked it grew rapidly larger and darker. The whole sky was soon overcast and big drops of rain began to fall. A little hand was raised from the low bench.

"Be we a-doin' to have a funder shower?"

Miss Melvin said "Yes," but, such an occurrence being not very uncommon, bade the class go on with their reading, unconscious of the adaptation of the piece she had selected to the hour. They read:

"On Horeb's rock the prophet stood,

The Lord before him passed;

A hurricane in angry mood

Swept by him strong and fast;

The forests fell before its force,

The rocks were shivered in its course,

God was not in the blast.

'Twas but the whirlwind of His breath  
Announcing danger, wreck and death.

"It ceased ; the air grew still : a cloud  
Came, muffling up the sun,  
When from the mountain, deep and loud,  
An earthquake thundered on.  
The frightened eagle sprang in air,  
The wolf ran howling from his lair,  
God was not in the storm.

'Twas but the rolling of His car,  
The trampling of His steeds from far.

"'Twas still again ; and Nature stood  
And calmed her ruffled frame,  
When swift from heaven a fiery flood  
To earth devouring came ;  
Back to its depths the ocean fled,  
The sickening sun looked wan and dead,  
God was not in the flame.

'Twas but the terror of His eye  
That lightened through the troubled sky."

Between the verses there were involuntary pauses when the thunder, growing constantly deeper and deeper, and the lightning, becoming more and more vivid, caused the children to hold their breath in very fear and look



anxiously toward their teacher. But she did not bid them stop, though by this time every eye was nearly blinded by the frequent and constant strokes, and the sound of their voices could scarcely be heard above the steady roll of thunder which burst every now and then into deafening peals.

At the end of the third verse every book dropped, and ungovernable terror seized hold upon every soul as the storm grew fearfully wild and furious and the scenes on Mount Horeb seemed themselves being repeated. The crying children huddled around Miss Melvin, herself pale and terrified. All but two were there clinging to her chair, hiding their eyes from the piercing lightning in the folds of her dress and covering their ears with their hands. Alice and Rhoda sat together in their own seat, their arms intertwined and their heads resting one upon the other.

They too were very pale, and Alice trembled excessively, while she heard distinctly the

loud beating of Rhoda's heart. But the latter had whispered in her ear: "It is our heavenly Father. Will He not take care of us? Let us ask Him." And while the two heads had been bowed together on the desk before them a silent prayer had gone up from each heart, which the Father in heaven heard above the storm, and answered.

No one had noticed the act save Miss Melvin, but she had seen and guessed its meaning. She knew why their lifted faces were calm, and in that hour of danger and, to her, soul-shaking fear coveted their trustful faith.

A terrific crash that moment shook the very earth, and the building seemed to totter on its foundations. Every child was stunned and Miss Melvin herself stiffened by the electric shock. Down one side of the room the burning fluid took its fiery way and passed to a gigantic tree a few rods distant, shivering it into innumerable fragments.

Not for some time was the little frightened band aware of what had happened, but when



consciousness came they saw with what an escape they had met, and shuddered while they waited for what yet might come. But this had been the culminating moment of the storm. Gradually the thunders grew less and less loud, the lightning less severe and frequent, and the rain ceased.

At length, recovered in a measure from their terrible fright, the children picked up their fallen books, yet open at the spot where they had been reading, and Miss Melvin, glancing at the forgotten lesson, said softly: "You may read the last verse in unison," which they did with awed voices and manner hushed and solemn. Miss Melvin could only listen to the low, subdued tones:

"At last a voice all still and small  
Rose sweetly on the ear,  
Yet rose so shrill and clear that all  
In heaven and earth might hear:  
It spoke of peace, it spoke of love,  
It spoke as angels speak above,  
And God Himself was there.

For oh, it was a Father's voice,  
It bade the trembling world rejoice."

To the listener's tempest-tossed soul there came then the voice "all still and small" speaking peace. Long seeking rest and finding none, she came then to the Father, and His voice turned her trembling into rejoicing. In her heart there was a great calm, like that which followed the outward tempest, and as the sun, breaking at length through the clouds, spread a brilliant radiance over the landscape, so the beams of the Sun of Righteousness lit her soul, long in darkness, with heavenly glory.

She told this to Alice and Rhoda after the close of school, with an arm around each and the light of a new love beaming from her eyes.

"I have found your Saviour," she said, "and I want you to thank God for sending me here to learn of you His preciousness."



## CHAPTER X.

FROM that time a new order of things prevailed at the Bearhill school. The cloud passed away from the teacher's brow with the darkness from her mind, and the light of her inner peace and joy was reflected in her countenance. Even the small ones felt the change, and loved now to say their A, B, C's to dear Miss Melvin, who had not always been gentle and patient with their tardy progress.

The morning Testament reading was no longer a dull and spiritless exercise. Her own increasing interest soon spread itself among all the scholars, and when a few mornings after the memorable thunder-storm she asked them at close of the chapter to bow their heads upon the desks before them and repeat with her the Lord's Prayer, every

head dropped and every voice was audible in the slow and reverent petitions.

During the few weeks that remained of the term it was a happy school, and when the last day, unwelcome but inevitable, arrived there was a sore parting between teacher and pupils, many a tear was shed and promises of remembrance exchanged. It was especially grievous to Alice and Rhoda, who were sure they would never love another teacher as well as Miss Melvin. But she longed to go home that she might tell to her companions and friends what the Lord had done for her soul, and in the ardour of her new love and joy in God's salvation she felt sure that even her father could not resist her testimony to its truth and blessedness.

Autumn came with brilliant tints for the forests, harvests for the barns and fruits for the store-houses. The little Browns picked up apples, dug potatoes, husked corn, and at night made grinning "jack-o'-lanterns" of the yellow pumpkins that lay in a huge pile



near the barn. Vacation was seldom too long for them, for they had little time to play, their thrifty father finding "no end of chores" for them to do, even after the crops were gathered in. But when autumn deepened into winter, wheels began to rumble noisily over frozen ground and brooks to show skimmings of glistening ice, suggestive of skates and coasting, Sam and Harry, with the older brothers, Joe and Bob, as well as a score of other boys in the Bearhill district, not to mention as many girls, were quite ready for the reopening of school. Nor did they consider the amusements alluded to as at all incompatible with the pursuit of arithmetic, geography and spelling—on the contrary as essential and delightful accessories.

So, one frosty morning in the early part of December, a great fire was kindled in the rusty box-stove; the noseless pitcher was consigned to the obscurity of the woodshed corner; the floor was tidily swept, desks dusted, and a new teacher—this time a gen-

tleman, fierce of countenance (so thought the little ones) and full as tall as Goliath—took the throne tutorial.

When the school had come to order in obedience to a vigorous rap on the teacher's desk with his heavy ruler, he saw the last summer's pupils all there—Alice McDoyle, her fair, lovely face fairer and lovelier than ever; Rhoda, with her old sweet smile and eyes of perfect content; little Bennie, of polywog memory; the little boy that lisped; the young Browns, with their former stock of roguery indefinitely multiplied, as evinced by their dancing eyes; their two older brothers, Joe and Bob, chips from the same block; and a host of new scholars, besides, all eager to open the winter's campaign.

The last part of the summer term had been a season of unalloyed enjoyment to our little humpback. Her gentleness had won the hearts of nearly every scholar, and if there were some who in thoughtlessness or perversity still offered an occasional taunt, it was at



the cost of a well-merited punishment from Miss Melvin, whose precepts thus inculcated had wrought a salutary change in this respect in the school.

But "another king arose who knew not" Rhoda. So chuckled Sam Brown to himself as, under the new administration, he saw little acts of indignity toward Rhoda go unrebuked by the new teacher, and grew bold himself in copying them, for he had not forgotten his old grudge and promised vengeance. These did not proceed from the old pupils, who had learned to love the unfortunate orphan too well, but from rough and ugly boys among the new ones. They were sly and unfrequent at first, but became open and unrestrained as the teacher, who was not unfeeling, but unobserving, did nothing to check them, and Rhoda never complained. Had the perpetrators of them watched the meek face of the poor girl, pale with the hurt of some derisive speech, but never angry or resentful, they would surely have been arrested in their

cruel sport. But they delighted to call up a flush in Alice's pretty cheek and the indignant fire in her eye, to ridicule the two friends' fondness for each other, and to provoke the cries of "Shame! shame! It's too bad!" from the helpless smaller scholars.

But there was one among them who seemed troubled with qualms of conscience on this subject. Joe Brown, naturally kind of heart and struck with a sense of the injustice of such conduct, stood aloof. At first he simply remained silent when Humpty Dumpty's crooked figure and funny crippled gait became the subject of amusement, but this was not long sufficient. As he saw more of her lovely character, in his better acquaintance with her during their long walks to and from school every day, his respect for her increased, and a sort of tenderness came over his manner toward her, for Joe had a heart within him, and it was touched by the sight of her weakness and infirmity, and yet more by her patient endurance of it.



When the road was rough or the snow deep he gently lifted her over the hard places, and many a morning, when otherwise she would have been kept at home, Joe appeared at the door with his hand-sled, on which his own little sister was already snugly curled up, and the two were taken swiftly yet safely down the slippery hill to school. If the weather was very cold, his big mittens were drawn over hers, and his tippet tied round her neck. So she became in some sort Joe's protégée, and greatly did she rejoice in the sense of protection it gave her from Sam's mischievous persecutions. Fleecy, too, was quite safe now, Sam being kept in awe by a direful threat if he touched a single hair. So at school Joe could not long endure the treatment to which Rhoda was at times subjected, and at length became her champion in good earnest. It was on his sled that she always had a snug, safe place in their coasting frolics, and no one dared object, though many coveted the place.

"Come on, Rhoda!" he called out, one noon-time, when the coasting was particularly splendid; "we'll have the first slide."

Hastening to do the welcome bidding, her foot slipped and she fell at full length on the icy ground.

"Hurrah! Humpty Dumpty had a great fall! Go it again!" shouted one of the roughest boys. The next instant his breath was fairly taken away by a great blow on the side of the head, from the fist of Joe Brown, which sent him reeling to the foot of the hill, where a huge drift received him, plunged to his armpits in the smothering snow. There was no retaliation, for Joe, besides being the oldest and largest, was also the stoutest, boy in school. After that they became circumspect, and calculated their proximity to Joe's avenging fist before venturing on any similar speeches.



## CHAPTER XI.

**B**UT notwithstanding Joe's care and help in her daily walks and grandma's nursing at home, Rhoda grew pale and thin, and days came often when she could not go to school at all. She seemed like a shadow of something beautiful, and in looking upon her one forgot everything but the almost heavenly expression of her large dark eyes. She grew so light that often, going home from school, too tired and strengthless to walk unaided, stout Joe Brown took her in his strong arms and carried her quite to her grandmother's kitchen, where he would set her down as gently as if she had been made of the most fragile wax-work.

Having deposited her tenderly there one still, quiet afternoon in January, he started on the run for the farm-house, for it was getting

dark even earlier than usual this short winter's day. The sky was heavily clouded over, and already snow was beginning to fall. All night it came noiselessly down, filling every nook and cranny and piling in drifts across the road, wholly hiding the fences from sight. Rhoda could scarcely see out of her low bedroom window when she waked in the morning, and was almost ready to sigh when she saw the prospect of a long day at home before her.

But before eight o'clock a brisk "Gee up, Bright!" the same that in the spring-time used to rouse Miss Melvin from her slumbers, drew Mrs. Pettibone and Rhoda to the door, where they found Joe, with his stout cattle, and "the steers" besides, yoked to the big sled, breaking a path.

"Wrap her up, Mrs. Pettibone, and I'll take her down to school snug as a bug in a rug." So she went.

From other directions came other ox-teams



and sleds, making paths to the school-house, so that at the usual hour the entire number of scholars was there in spite of the deep snow, and all in high glee, for well they loved the sports which such a state of things promised — snow-balling, fort-building and bombarding.

The sun was out in great brilliancy all day, and with so much heat as by noon to put the snow in just the right state to be moulded at pleasure. Various were the structures that grew up beneath the ingenious hands of the half-crazy boys. Sometimes a miniature bridge with rounded arches drew shouts of admiration from the appreciating crowd. Then a castle with towers and turrets stood admired for a few moments, and was battered down by snow-made shot and shell. Then the more skilful attempted statues. An Indian with feathers in his hair brandished a clumsy tomahawk for a little while, then by a few changes was transformed into a crowned king, with a long icicle for a sceptre, who

in his turn was dethroned to give place to George Washington.

"Three cheers," shouted Joe Brown, "for the Father of his Country!" And merrily they rang out on the winter air.

When these had died out and the cry for something new began to be heard from the clamorous throng, some of the girls watching with eager delight the sport suggested: "A woman! Oh, make a woman with a bonnet on!" which feat being successfully accomplished, a burst of applause resounded from all quarters and found a tiny echo inside the school-room, where with faces pressed close against the window-pane stood Alice and Rhoda, the latter too feeble now to engage in out-door sport and Alice unwilling to leave her.

When the figure of the old woman stood out in its white, jagged outline, Rhoda clapped her small white hands together, and two merry laughs filled the school-room with ringing music. Joe must have heard it, for



he came with two or three long strides to the window, and, raising it, begged the girls to come out just for a few minutes. He wanted to introduce them to "the old damsel." During the pause in the sport which this occasioned, and while Joe's back was turned, Sam, having rolled together a great armful of snow, crept sliely up behind the image and deposited it on its back, at the same time giving the head a shove which planted it square upon the shoulders.

"Humpty Dumpty, as I live!" shouted one of the big boys.

"Humpty Dumpty! Hurrah!" was echoed by others, vociferously.

Joe turned instantly, just in time to catch sight of the retreating form of his wicked brother, but not until Rhoda had already seen the cruel transformation. She sunk back from the window, and leaned a moment upon Alice. Then, with a quick, pleading gesture, she caught the sleeve of Joe, who with flashing eyes and an angry mutter was

just starting in pursuit of the sneaking boy fleeing in wholesome fear of his brother's indignation: "Don't strike him, Joe, please don't," and the petition prevailed. Sam afterward knew this, and would have given worlds to take back that hour's work.

Rhoda was not at school the next day, nor the next, nor ever again. Joe nevermore carried the frail little figure up the rugged mountain side or took her riding on his swift-running sled. Sam never again wounded her poor, sore heart by words or deeds of unkindness. Her pale, wan face was missed from its place in the school-room, and Alice felt a great desolation in her heart. The reply to an anxious inquiry, put tremblingly to her mother after an early visit to the brown cottage, dashed all her hopes, and she knew that her darling Rhoda was surely fading from earth. How this conviction was deepened when, being permitted to go herself to the sick room, she took the emaciated hand and looked upon the wasted face of the friend she



loved so well! In an uncontrollable burst of grief she buried her face in the pillow, and Rhoda whispered: "Poor Alice!" Yes, it was no longer "Poor Rhoda!"

Glad, happy Rhoda! She would soon be with the angels, where, she told Alice again and again, she would be "straight and beautiful like them." "And oh, I shall be like the blessed Saviour, for I shall see Him as He is."

As she went on to speak of the joy this would be and of all the glory of the heavenly world, a glimpse of which she seemed already to have caught, Alice grew calm and comforted. She thought how sweet it must be to Rhoda to lay down her life so weary, her body so weak and suffering, and be at rest in the peaceful home above. It seemed then the hand of a loving Father taking His dear child away from earth's sorrow and pain to His own bosom, where she might for ever lean and be at peace.

She almost caught the rapture of her dying

friend as together they looked across the dark river and heard almost the song of the waiting angels on the other shore. Alice left the humble room feeling as if she had been on the very verge of heaven.



## CHAPTER XII.

A FEW weary, painful weeks she lingered—weeks of bodily anguish, but of spiritual ecstasy. The members of Bearhill school, now that she was no longer there, but lay dying so peacefully in her grandmother's cottage, knew that an angel had walked among them. Her name was spoken softly, and from day to day the mournful words went round, "She's no better." "She's not so well, they say." Many a message of love was sent her, and token of sympathy.

None were so anxious to do something for her as Sam Brown. Struck with remorse for his cruel conduct, he sought in every possible way to make amends, and hovered around Mrs. Pettibone's door, on the constant watch for some errand to run or some work to do which might be useful to them, the perpetual

inquiry in his face, if not on his lips, "How is she now?"

Every few days he brought fresh apples from his father's cellar to be roasted for the invalid, and occasionally a bowl of custard he had begged from his mother. To these were added delicacies of all sorts from the parsonage, with everything that loving hearts could devise to cheer and comfort her. All this made her happy, though it could not take away her pain or give her strength, but what most rejoiced her heart was Sam's altered conduct.

"Rhoda," said her grandmother one day, "Sam wants to see you. Shall I let him come?"

"Oh yes!" she answered, gladly, and as he entered the room smiled sweetly upon him—her own old smile, with something heavenly in it now.

Coming nearer, he stood still with utter astonishment at the changed countenance, and, not daring to take the thin white hand



extended toward him, dropped into a chair by the bedside and covered his face with his jacket sleeve, the words he had been longing to say sadly choking him :

"I'm so, so sorry! Oh can you forgive me? *Can you, Rhoda?*"

"Oh, Sam," said the feeble voice, "I've already forgiven you" — words which the really penitent boy caught eagerly. He had been afraid she might die before he could ask the dreaded question. Reassured, he ventured to look up, and saw through contrite tears the loving smile with which the dying girl added: "And I have prayed God to forgive you, too, Sam, and to make you one of His dear children."

He was growing accustomed to the deathly pallour of her face and the hollow eyes, but his own fell now, and he pulled uneasily at the buttons on his jacket.

"Sam," Rhoda began again, taking a small Bible from under her pillow. She hesitated a moment. This precious book she had in-

tended to leave with her beloved Alice as her only legacy, but a new thought, which after a moment she fully accepted, came to her mind.

“I want to give you my Bible, Sam,” she said, “and I want you to promise that you will read it *every day*.”

“I will,” the boy answered, then took the book reverently from her hand and left the room with a holy and lifelong purpose in his soul.

During the days that followed, Rhoda grew gradually weaker and thinner, happier, too, as she neared the heavenly city. In sweet serenity of soul she waited the opening of its pearly portals, and so gently was loosed the silver cord that bound her spirit here that the aged watcher by her bedside scarce could tell the moment of its departure.

Bending above the cold lips, she fancied she saw them moving again, framing the words so lately and so fervently breathed from them: “I shall be satisfied when I



awake in Thy likeness," but they were still. She was satisfied. An angel form and harp and crown of gold were hers. And she was like the blessed Saviour, for she saw Him face to face.

The bereaved old grandmother closing gently the sightless eyes; Alice listening to the strokes of the tolling bell numbering the eleven short years of her life; Miss Melvin reading the letter which conveyed to her the not unexpected news,—each said: "It is well. She is equal with the angels now."

A grave was made her in the old churchyard, and thither the children of the Bearhill school for many a summer wandered at noon-time, talking of her lovely life, scattering flowers above her that drooped as she drooped, and cherishing in their hearts a sweet and holy memory.

THE END.

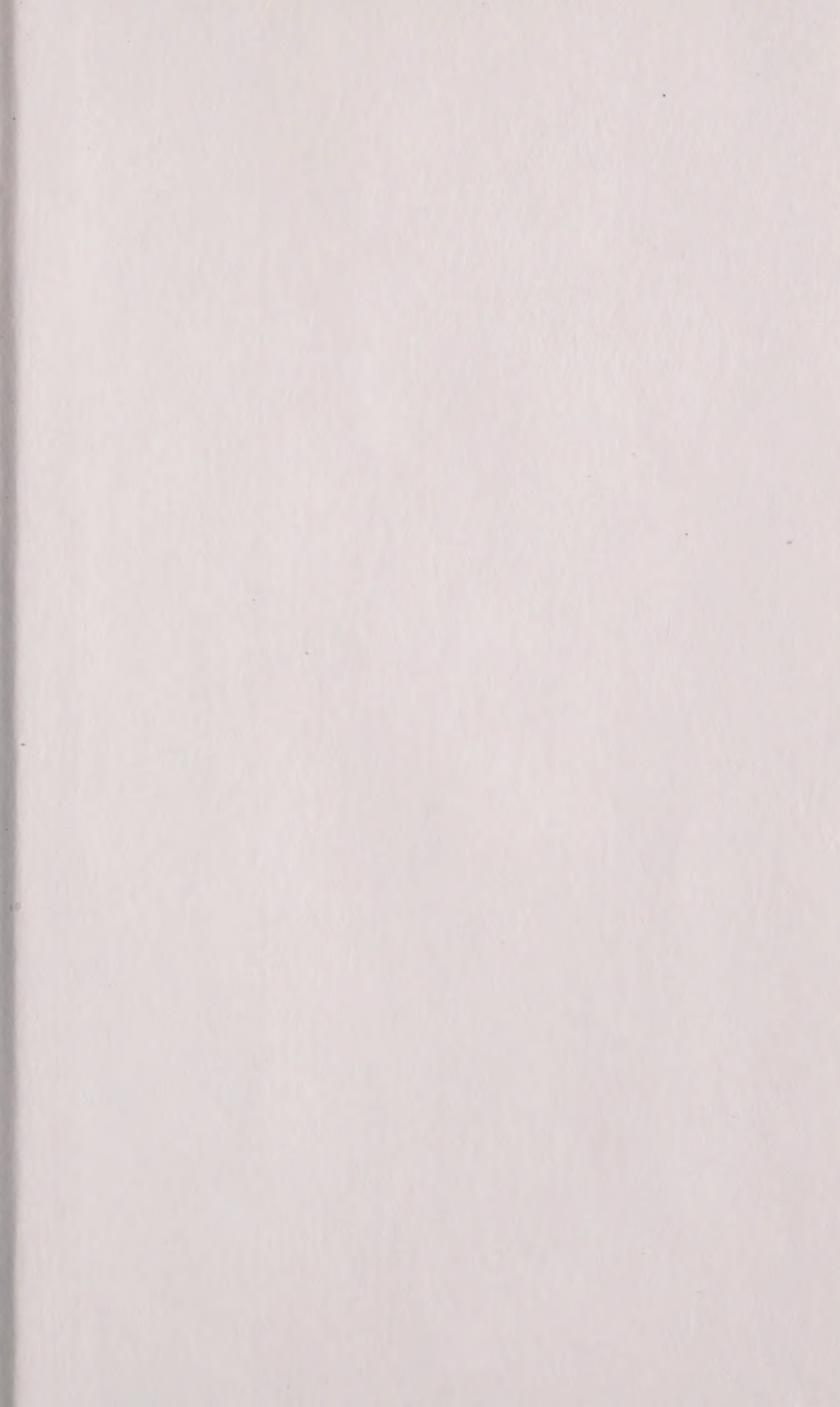
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